

BEAR RIVER

By Pamela Ostermiller

FAST FACTS:

Counties: Cache, Rich, Box Elder

Major Cities: Logan (43,675), Brigham City (17,149), Smithfield (7,801)

Regional Civilian Labor Force: 71,949

Per Capita Income: \$18,059 (Cache), \$29,081 (Rich), \$21,361 (Box Elder)

Major Employers: Utah State University, Thiokol Corporation, ICON, E.A. Miller, Convergys, Autoliv, Lodge at Bear Lake

Average Sale Price of Homes, Third Quarter 2004: Cache/Rich \$161,802

Great Quality of Life for Birds and Humans



At the north end of what Utahns call the Wasatch Front is the gateway to the Bear River Region, with an economic landscape as diverse as the bird species that inhabit one of its most popular tourist attractions, the Bear River Bird Refuge.

From missiles to meat and from raspberries to cheese, the range of products, services and attractions the region offers is akin to the longest menu at the most authentic Chinese restaurant. The possibilities are truly endless. Experienced and dedicated economic developers in the areas counties, it appears, see economic diversity not as a goal, but as a starting point, and have based their goals on this ideology. Box Elder is continually promoting its historical, agricultural and natural heritage. Cache is a model for long-range goals and future-forward thinking. Rich is a rural enclave, a peaceful corner of the state where its traditional way of life is its biggest asset.

BOX ELDER: SEEKING BUSINESSES AND BIRDERS

Traveling north along the Wasatch Front, past the Ogden metropolis and its expanding suburbs, the scenery gradually changes and reveals the wide, sprawling landscapes of Box Elder County and its appealing rural setting. Passing historic Brigham City, one can see flocks of ibis in the sky, herons in the marshes and threshers in the fields. These are the bounties of Box Elder County—its natural resources and agricultural heritage, resources on which county and city planners are capitalizing to promote growth, tourism and prosperity in the region. Economic developers are also working on strategies to attract new and innovative companies that will blend with and benefit existing industries.

"Things are going very well here," says Susan Thackeray with economic development for the county, pointing to a few new projects and companies taking root in the area. According to the Utah Department of Workforce Service



es, construction was the economy's bright spot in 2005, doubling both valuation and permits over this same time in 2004. Unemployment held steady and consumer spending is up 2.7 percent.

In business news, Tarter Gate Co., a Kentucky-based fence manufacturer, will be the second company to open in the Agribusiness Park in Corinne. The first was Archibald Propane. Tarter Gate Company is one of the largest manufacturers of farm gates and animal management equipment in North America, with almost a half-million square feet of production facilities in Kentucky. Now, its newest manufacturing and distribution center is under construction in Box Elder County.

The approximately 100-acre Agribusiness Park is located in an Economic Development Area (EDA), a key tool in economic development; the infrastructure was built with about \$1 million in grant money. The park is part of a county economic development plan and planners welcome Tarter Gate, but the park has not yet attracted tenants as rapidly as developers had hoped. "Funding is a real challenge, especially given the incentives surrounding states are offering to locate there."

To combat this competition and further the county's growth, Thackeray emphasizes, another focal point of the county's plan is to help existing businesses, such as supporting a recent business-to-business event for subcontractors held in conjunction with ATK Thiokol and the Small Business Development Center at Weber State University. Contractors from the Box Elder region attended to help smaller businesses learn how to make contact and establish working relationships and gain contracts.

On the tourism front, Box Elder County is increasingly for the birds—and birdwatchers. The Bear River Bird Refuge, already a huge draw to birders from around the world, is working to attract more of this particular breed of tourist. Completed in August, the James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center, located west of Brigham City, will provide opportunities for the public to learn about wildlife and plant species of the refuge



and the Great Salt Lake ecosystem. The architecturally unique center will serve as a resource for environmental education for schools and universities, youth organizations, conservation organizations, and other groups interested in the importance of wetlands.

And yet, the birds have their challenges. Pointe Perry, a "themed" development that purports to host a major outdoor sporting goods retailer, truck stop and hotel, is to be located on west side of I-15 adjacent the bird refuge. It includes over 100 acres of land, the more desirable pieces of which are still to be mitigated with the refuge and are being pursued by the developers.

Bountiful rains alleviated the drought and aided farmers of the state's most productive region in products such as wheat, barley, oats and corn. According to the most recent available statistics from the Utah Department of Agriculture and the USDA, Box Elder County is the state's top producer of winter wheat. Overall, the economy looks good in Box Elder and all economic indicators show that the county's development plans and other factors are working.

CACHE COUNTY: MAKING CONNECTIONS

It's impossible to visit Cache County without noticing change—the essence of the county's current triumphs and troubles. Located in a scenic, rural area at the top of the state, Cache Valley is an increasingly attractive place to be, with Logan an ever-more sophisticated central city, expanding job opportunities and a

major research university. The challenge is controlling growth so that mismanagement and neglect don't soil these fine qualities. As author and environmentalist Edward Abbey said, growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of a cancer cell. There is, however, a highly focused plan at work in Cache County in relation to connectivity—in transportation and communication, both important factors in helping businesses stay globally competitive. Cache County is moving people, products and ideas into the modern age.

The Cache Valley Initiative, a five-year plan designed to build infrastructure for community and economic development, has been a successful engine and is now moving into phase two. The keys of the plan are surface transportation access, telecommunication access and air transportation access. The plan also aims to protect vistas, travel corridors and agricultural land.

As of 2005, many of the goals of the first phase have been met, according to Sandra Emile, director of the initiative and president of the Cache Valley Chamber of Commerce. "The Cache Valley Initiative has been so successful, we raised around \$1 million and will be able to show almost \$4 million to enhance and support economic development in this community," she says.

More specifically, fundraising efforts have been met, and hundreds of jobs have been created. The components have been achieved by adding a redundant fiber-optic telecommunications line, with double capacity and bandwidth, to ensure that everyone in the valley has Internet

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connectivity. Comcast has entered the market to provide this capability.

On the front of air access, the commercial carrier Vision Air, headquartered in Las Vegas, recently signed a contract to make two round trips per day to Denver and one round trip per day to Las Vegas. Emile says this is a big step for business in the valley. "I already have businesses calling about buying bulk corporate tickets, that's how excited people are," she says. "Where Cache Valley in the past has not been able to play in the global market without a great deal of difficulty, now we can. Time equals money and that last hour and a half, to travel from the Salt Lake airport to the valley, was the straw that broke the camel's back. Our businesses can now be more competitive."

In the realm of ground access, the Corridor Access Management Plan for Highway 89/91, which runs through the heart of the valley, and other major corridors, is now being implemented as a statewide ordinance to protect highway access

and vistas.

In technology and education, Utah State University's Innovation Campus is about to undergo a substantial expansion, increasing office and lab space by four million square feet. Teresa McKnight, manager of Innovation Campus, says it's a model for research parks around the country: "It's the best kept secret in Utah."

The mission of the campus "is to provide an environment with facilities, technology, services, programs and expertise that stimulate and support the creation and growth of research and technology-based enterprises," says McKnight. The goal of all research parks is to create high-tech, high-paying jobs and, in Logan specifically, to provide companies and employers with "access to the best and brightest students." There are currently more 50 companies, including Letterpress Software, Space Dynamics Lab and Gemini Life Sciences, working from the campus. The 18-year-old campus received a \$2.5 million grant last year from

the U.S. Commerce Department to make infrastructure improvements for upcoming expansions.

Historic downtown Logan hasn't been left out of the development hopper. Goals include preserving historic buildings; enhancing sidewalks and walkability; creating community events such as Easter egg hunts, art strolls and festivals; and bringing more retail to empty storefronts. "We have fewer empty spaces now than ever," says Emile. "We have real vitality here."

Overall, Cache Valley's economy is sturdy, according to Utah's Department of Workforce Services, as measured by jobs and construction. More than 1,000 new jobs were added and residential housing permits were up 29 percent. In a nutshell, says Emile, "We need economic growth, but we don't need to shoot ourselves in the foot. It will be devastating if we don't preserve and protect."

RICH COUNTY: SLOW AND STEADY

Travel through the high country, through isolated Randolph or Woodruff any day of the week—Sunday, holiday, weekday, spring or fall—and life seems to amble at the same slow pace. Never a new business, never a new façade. But, in this case, maybe change isn't good. In the least, with the help of Mother Nature, this county that relies on agriculture and tourism has had a decent year.

According to the Utah Department of Workforce Services, there was some job growth, some improvement in construction values, and some increase in construction valuation, all in the first quarter of 2005. The best news is that, thanks to rain that doused much of the state in 2005, Bear Lake, often called the

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"Caribbean of the Rockies," was at its highest level in five years, and the downstream farmers who depend on its water are much better off than in 2004. And because of natural flow down the river from melting snow and spring rains, the lake irrigation pumps were not turned on until mid-August.

In regards to tourism, the Bear Lake Marina may be expanding. The SLC-based Bear Lake Yacht Club wants to expand the marina so it can accommodate deep water boating. The Garden City Town Council supports the request, which would increase the 355 available spaces to accommodate 300 more.

There are also hopeful signs for the famous, sweet Bear Lake raspberries. For the first time in five years, according to the Utah Department of Workforce Services, Rich County raspberry growers are recovering from a worldwide virus that annihilated crops in five of nine raspberry farms in the county. Rich County may be on its way to reclaiming its place as the top raspberry-producing county in the state.